

The Encore

2 Kings 13:10-24

Elisha outlives almost all of his contemporaries. He is now over 70 years old and sick with an illness from which he knows he will not recover. The name “Elisha” means “My God is salvation.” And now on his deathbed, the salvation of God is his comfort. He knows that the last enemy, Death, will not speak the last word over him because the LORD is his salvation.

Through this slow-progressing illness, God gives Elisha time to reflect upon the LORD’s faithfulness all through his life. Elisha thinks back over 50 years earlier when Elijah met him as he was out in the field plowing with 12 yokes of oxen. He thinks back to seeing Elijah standing by the field and then passing right by him. He remembers feeling something soft fall upon his shoulders. He looks at his shoulder and then at Elijah and realizes that Elijah has thrown his mantle over him. **He knows that Elijah is calling him to make a decision to follow him and enter the ministry of the LORD.** Elisha loves the LORD even as a young man. Immediately he leaves the oxen and asks only one thing, *“Would you let me go home and kiss my mom and dad good-bye before I follow you wherever you have me to go?”*

As he places his lips on his mom and dad’s cheek, he knows that he is entering a life of ministry to the LORD. He knows ministry is a life filled with joys and sorrows, with celebrations and tears, with peace and conflict, with ease and struggle. Such is the nature of the work of the LORD.

Now on his death bed he reviews those 23 years spent as Elijah’s apprentice, seeing the LORD perform miracle after miracle. With fondness he thinks to that day when Elijah departed out of the world **by a whirlwind, escorted by a chariot of with horses on fire.**

Elisha then praises the LORD for His faithfulness to him during those decades of speaking God’s truth to the people of Israel. **Elisha considers the LORD’s power displayed through the many, many miracles that the power of the LORD performed through him.** He thinks back to some of his favorites . . . **the resurrection of the Shunammite’s son, the healing of leprous Naaman, the floating ax head . . . he smiles upon each remembrance. How good is the LORD!!**

When King Joash hears that Elisha is dying he immediately takes a chariot to see this aged prophet before he is gone from this world. **He is troubled for a number of reasons, not least of which is a looming threat of a powerful enemy . . . the Syrians.** The Syrians had already decimated Israel’s military through various

wars. (cf 13:7). Joash often lies awake in bed at night, knowing how weak his army is. He tries in vain to **find a human solution** to the power and the malice of the Syrians. **His one comfort is that the LORD is for Israel.** So when he is told that Israel's prophet is dying, it shakes him. **Elisha's ministry in Israel communicates that YHWH is not yet finished with them. In view of Elisha's impending death, he asks, "will the LORD still protect Israel?"**

As Joash enters Elisha's home, he weeps as he climbs the steps to Elisha's room. He sees Elisha lying so weak and frail in the bed. He kneels down by the bed and in tears exclaims, *"My father! My father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!"*

Elisha smiles and urges Joash to take up a bow and some arrows. **He wants Joash to know that Syria will not be defeated by his tears, but by his manly action of faith.** There is a time for crying and there is a time for grabbing your bow. Elisha tells Joash to put his hand on his bow. When he does that, Elisha reaches out and places his hand on top of Joash's hand. Elisha wants Joash to know that he is for the king and more importantly that the LORD is on Israel's side amidst the threats of the powerful Syrians.

Elisha instructs him to open the eastern window and to shoot an arrow out of it. **With a low halting voice he tells Joash that the arrow symbolizes the victory that the LORD would grant him over his Syrian enemy.** Joash breathes a sigh of peace as Syria is such an overwhelming, formidable foe.

Elisha then says, *"Hit the ground with the arrows!"* Now when a man like Elisha says, "Hit the ground with the arrows." You know that it means something.

Joash hesitates perhaps because he is not excited about any war with the Syrians and is not sure about the prophecy of victory. So he hits the ground three times and then stops.

Elisha is old and dying, but he is not dead! **He is stirred to anger** at the unbelief inside of Joash' heart.

"Why did you stop at three? Surely you know that God is promising to give you a victory with every strike of the arrow!!! You could have hit the ground five, six and more times! Then you would have beaten Syria so badly that they never would come back to harm you again. As it is, you will defeat him only have three times."

Then Elisha breathed one more time and he died. For it is appointed unto every man to die once and after that to stand before the judgment of the LORD. Elisha is ready not because he has not sinned against the LORD, but because he has received the grace of God by faith. He is a man forgiven.

Sometime later, a band of Moabite robbers invade Israel to rob people of food and clothes and money. One day some men are burying a man in a stone tomb and they spot some of the Moabite raiders coming their way. In fear, they throw the body of this man into the stone sepulcher and run to safety. Now this is the exact grave where Elisha was buried. As the body of this dead man tumbles into the stone cave, it touches Elisha's dead body. Instantly, this dead man springs to life, stands up and walks out of the grave! **This kind of thing had never happened before and would not happen again in all biblical history.**

Main Idea: God prepares specific good works for each of His children to accomplish in their life. These works bring glory to God, but they are not easy. Let us never quit the labors that the LORD gives us to strengthen His church!

"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:58 [ESV](#))

"Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart." (2 Corinthians 4:1 [ESV](#))

"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up." (Galatians 6:9 [ESV](#))

"As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good." (2 Thessalonians 3:13 [ESV](#))

"Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted." (Hebrews 12:3 [ESV](#))

Five Realities of God's Work:

Reality #1: The servant in ministry is temporary.

"Now when Elisha had fallen sick with the illness of which he was to die," (2 Kings 13:14 [ESV](#))

God has a time for each of us to participate in His eternal work. What a privilege! For some people, that time is relatively long on a human scale. For others, it seems altogether too short. I love reading Christian biography, and I have often wondered why the LORD would choose to take the David Brainards, the William Bordens, the Jim Elliots, the Keith Greens, the John and Betty Stams and the Henry Martins out of this world before they turned 30. Allow me to share one short sketch about the Stams.

John and Betty Stam met and married while students at Moody Bible Institute. They graduated in 1932 and were sent as missionaries to China with the China Inland Mission. They had a very fruitful ministry there for two years. They also had a little baby girl during their ministry in China.

In 1934, the communists found a Bible and Christian literature in their house, so they were captured, imprisoned, and executed. John was just 27 and Betty was 28. Their baby daughter miraculously survived however. As one account of their lives puts it:

“The Stams’ powerful Christian testimony was carried to the ends of the earth by hundreds of secular newspapers which featured front-page stories about the Stams’ faith, dedication—and martyrdom. Many unbelievers turned to Christ; many believers were so moved by the Stams’ zeal that they became missionaries themselves.”

I thank God that He allowed Billy Graham to live 98 years on this earth. God used Billy Graham in my dad’s salvation story. That was true of thousands of people. But Billy Graham’s earthly ministry is not here any more. He is not creating any more sermons to preach.

As a high schooler, I was impacted profoundly by both John MacArthur and Chuck Swindoll. Both men are now in their 80s and will one day be taken from this world. And the LORD will replace them with someone else. We are servants on God’s baseball diamond. We get to play the game. We get to hold a position.

Truth: All true ministry is God’s. None of it is “OURS”. And that is a good thing because it means that we get to be part of something eternal.

There was a time that a person could not go anywhere in the Western world and not be familiar with the name D L Moody. I love the story of Moody coming up to a man in a big city and asking him if he knew Jesus as his Savior. The man looked at him and said, “Who do you think you are, D L Moody?” Famously D L Moody said, “One day you will read in the papers that D L Moody is dead. Do not believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I have ever been!”

Our destiny is not tied to this world . . . not even to *ministry* in this world. Our destiny is tied to heaven. We set our minds on the thing above.

The question for us is not how long will I live to serve the LORD? The question is, **“What am I doing with the time that He gives to me?”**

Leonard Ravenhill once asked, “Are the things you are living for worth Christ dying for?”

Truth: God gives each of His children opportunity to do something eternally significant with our little lives. He does not ask us to possess great talents, but He calls us to great purpose.

The servant in ministry is temporary. This truth shocked King Joram. He was taken by surprise that Elisha was leaving this old world.

Reality #2: The term of ministry is lifelong.

Elisha ran all the way through the finish line. With his last breath, he spoke the word of the LORD. He urged King Joram to faith in the LORD. As long as he had breath, he was going to do the will of the LORD.

Illustration: Are you retiring? I must be throwing off a retirement vibe. 😊 No. I am not sure how long the LORD will have me on staff here at Bethany. I do not presume upon another hour, but I hope I will be a staff pastor here for another 7-10 years or more. The elders of our church will help me discern that. We have great elders and I trust them to do what is good for the glory of God.

But my commitment to the LORD is to do whatever the LORD asks me to do to advance His name and strengthen His church all the way till my last breath.

I want to say with Paul, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:7-8 ESV)

Some people ask, “Will there be golf in heaven?” With my tongue in my cheek I reply, *“Yes! But the only people who can get a tee time are those who gave themselves to the work of the LORD all the way to the day that they died.”*

Tongue in cheek. **BUT it is absolutely true that our happiness in heaven will be multiplied by our faithfulness here.**

Truth: The LORD keeps us here for His purpose. He has a work to accomplish through us. This work is varied, but it is always work. The LORD has no retirement from meaningful labor for His kingdom.

We will be tempted to say, *“I have done my time.” Or “I am too busy.” Or “I am too tired.” Or “I tried that and it was hard.”* BE REAL for a moment. The LORD’s garden is a place where we will get pierced by thorns, frustrated by rocks and overwhelmed by all the weeds. **But it is His garden and He is making something beautiful in it.**

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10 ESV)

Application: God loves us so much that He gives us opportunity to enter His work. Let us not waste even one opportunity that He provides!

Our great problem is that we do not see our lives the way the LORD sees them. We are tempted to see our life as a pursuit of comforts. But God sees our life as a pursuit of knowing Him and His love for us. We will not know how much He loves us by spending day after day combing the beach for shells or by chasing a little white ball down the fairway. **We come to know how deep, broad, long and high His love is for us as we worship Him through the reading of His Word, through our fellowship with His people, through our crying to Him in prayer and through our sweaty labors for His kingdom.**

HOW? *“This is the key to finishing life to the glory of Christ. If we are going to make Christ look glorious in the last years of our lives, we must be satisfied in him. He must be our Treasure. And the life that we live must flow from this all-satisfying Christ. And the life that flows from the soul that lives on Jesus is a life of love and service. This is what will make Christ look great.” John Piper*

Five Realities of God’s Work:

1. The servant in ministry is temporary.
2. The term of ministry is lifelong.

Reality #3: The aim of service is faith.

Joash begins well in obeying the LORD's instructions. He gets the bow and the arrows. He shoots one arrow through the window. But then he begins to waver in faith. He only strikes the ground three times.

"Then the man of God was angry with him and said, "You should have struck five or six times;" (2 Kings 13:19 [ESV](#))

Why is dying Elisha stirred to anger by Joash? Because he is passionate about God's glory and about ministering to Joash' soul.

His anger is not a sign of hatred toward Joash, but of love for him. He cares that Joash would experience the fullness of God's grace in his life and for the nation.

What is the greatest aim we can have when we minister to people? Faith, hope and love. We do not aim to simply, "Get things done." We aim to see the transformation of lives as they grow in faith, find hope and rejoice in love. This is the measure . . . not even that people are more moral or responsible. Those are part of faith, but people can be VERY moral and VERY responsible without experiencing faith, hope and love.

Sunday school teachers, "What do you pray for your students?" Not mainly for more knowledge. But for Faith, hope and love.

Door greeters, "What do you pray for those who see your smile?" Not mainly for all the doors to be covered. Faith, hope and love.

Care basket delivers, "What do you pray for the sick and the elderly whom you visit?" Not mainly for the right gifts to be packaged and delivered. Faith, hope and love.

Counselors, "What do you pray for those whom you counsel?" Not mainly for the counselee to feel better about life. Faith, hope and love.

Musicians, "What do you pray for those whom you share worship through music?" Not for the enjoyment of sweet sounding melodies. But Faith, hope and love.

Welcome café servants, "What do you pray for those who drink the coffee and taste the sweet breads?" Not mainly for hot coffee to be offered. But Faith, hope and love.

All ministry aims to grow faith, hope and love in the hearts of people. Young people. Middle-aged people. Old people.

Faith, hope and love is Elisha's target for Joram. Believe God. Hope in His covenant plan. Love Him first and love your people.

Without faith, hope and love . . . the church of Jesus is an empty shell of activity.

Application: A heart for Jesus' ministry always asks, "Does my presence in my church influence others to greater faith, hope and love?"

Joram struggled with the same thing we struggle with . . . unbelief. He did not have a vision for what God would do if he simply believed. He set his eyes on human weakness and not on the omnipotence of God. He doubts the LORD's willingness and ability. And so he acted in such a small way. Three strikes and he was out.

Truth: Unbelief causes us to miss the blessings of the opportunities that God places in front of us. Let us move forward in service to Jesus!

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Reality #4: The power of ministry is of the LORD.

"And as a man was being buried, behold, a marauding band was seen and the man was thrown into the grave of Elisha, and as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet." (2 Kings 13:21 [ESV](#))

Death has tremendous power. Who can hold death back when it comes for a person. All the scientists in the world cannot. Despite their best efforts, death prevails. All the riches in the world cannot. The richest of people die as surely as the poor. All the military might in the world cannot. The strongest of kings die. All the wisdom in the world cannot. Our universities are filled with pictures of very smart people who are dead. Death seems to be an undefeated enemy.

Until . . . until death faces God. Then death is a whimpering, impotent thing.

The ministry of God possesses the power to give life to dead people. Life in the soul. Life in a resurrected body. What other endeavor could we devote ourselves to that makes a stronger impact on individuals and upon the world?

Here this dead man's body simply touches the corpse of Elisha and he springs back to life. How hard is it for God to raise the dead?

"Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you." (Jeremiah 32:17 [ESV](#))

Symbol: Spiritually dead Israel will come to life again when she come in contact with God's Prophet. A connection to God's Prophet becomes the gateway of life. What is true for Israel is true for Gentiles too!

We miss the point of the story if we make much of Elisha. He is a mere man who possesses NO POWER to overcome death. That is evident by the fact that his body remained dead. THE POINT OF THE STORY POINTS US TO GOD . . . who is the author of life. **Ultimately, this story points us to the God-man . . . Jesus.**

If God's power vanquished death through the instrument of Elisha's decaying body, HOW MUCH MORE do we anticipate from the resurrected and living Son of God?!?

"Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"" (John 11:25–26 [ESV](#))

Two different truths spoken by Jesus.

1. **Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.**
2. **Everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.**

Explain how the first statement teaches us about our body's resurrection and the second statement teaches about our soul's safety.

We are made in the image of God with both body and soul. Sin invited death into God's good world and death touched both parts of us. Yet in Jesus, death does not have the final word over our either part of our lives. Death does not kill or destroy any part of the believer.

True, disease will eventually separate our souls from our bodies for a short time. But this physical body will be “healed” when Jesus returns and we receive our new bodies.

Our last breath on earth is our first breath in heaven. There is no pause between these two events. We have a God who heals us of all our diseases. We are right to bless the Lord at the funeral of a believer. **God has healed them of their illness and has given them a joyful entrance into His presence where they are more alive than they have ever been. A believer never loses a battle with cancer, heart disease, or infection. If we are in Jesus, we forever WIN the battle with death . . . our last enemy does not have any lasting say over our life.**

Illustration: D. L. Moody. One day you will read in the paper that DL Moody is dead. Do not believe a word of it. For at that time I will be MORE alive than I have ever been.

Applications:

- 1. Receive Jesus as LORD by faith! Jesus is our path to life.**
- 2. Live in the power of the resurrection of Jesus! Serve the LORD in the Spirit’s power. Only those abiding in Jesus will have power to produce lasting fruit. The power to give life is not in us, but in Him!**

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Reality #5: The work of God is eternal.

“But the LORD was gracious to them and had compassion on them, and he turned toward them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, nor has he cast them from his presence until now.” (2 Kings 13:23 [ESV](#))

The Bible wants us to know that God is faithful to the promises that He makes to national Israel. As Gentiles, we get to be grafted in to those eternal promises. But every promise that the LORD makes to Abraham regarding a people, a land and a blessing . . . these will all be fulfilled. Why though? Do the people of Israel who rejected Jesus as their King when He was born of a virgin DESERVE to be granted

such favor? No. None of us do. Why then? Because of the faithfulness of God. **The LORD refuses to give up on Israel in spite of all the sins, idolatries and offenses that she has committed against Him.**

Truth: The promise of God, not the faithfulness of the Israelites, motivated God to bless this people.

The complete fulfillment of this eternal covenant to Israel is yet future. Jesus will one day return and sit in Jerusalem on the throne of David. The nation will be all that God said she would be . . . a nation filled with the knowledge of God, flourishing in peace, righteousness and worship of Jesus.

Friends, I appeal to you . . . be faithful to your calling as servants of Jesus. Jesus is building His church. That is what He is doing. He calls each disciple to join Him in this eternal work. It is the only work that will last through eternity.

I rejoice in people's hobbies.

I love to go to one person's house and **see the classic car** that they restored.

I love to go to another person's house and **see the paintings** that they created.

I love to go to another person's house and **see the cabinets** that they crafted.

I love to go to another person's house and **taste the meals** that they cook.

I love to go to another person's house and **listen to the music** that they play.

I love to go to another person's house and **read the poems** that they have written.

God is sooooo glorious in giving so many different talents to so many people.

When God's people use their talents, they are expressing worship!

BUT . . . if we are not neck-deep in Jesus' ministry of building His church . . . then we are not connected to eternity.

*Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.
Give me Father, a purpose deep,
In joy or sorrow Thy word to keep;
Faithful and true what e'er the strife,
Pleasing Thee in my daily life;
C.T Studd*

Conclusion:

Main Idea: God prepares specific good works for each of His children to accomplish in their life. These works bring glory to God, but they are not easy. Let us never quit the labors that the LORD gives us to strengthen His church!

Today, I believe that many Christians have decided to be critics of the church rather than co-laborers in her. Too many point fingers at those who are laboring instead of rolling up their sleeves and joining them in ministry to Jesus.

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. . . . Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."
(John 15:1-5 [ESV](#))*

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- 1. The servant in ministry is temporary.**
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- 3. The aim of service is faith.**
- 4. The power of ministry is of the LORD.**
- 5. The work of God is eternal.**